EXTRACTING THE HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY OF NUMBERS IN THE *SĪRA:* THE CASE OF KHADĪJAH'S MARRIAGE TO THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD

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Abstract: There have been numerous studies devoted to examining the historical content of the *Sīra*. These studies have varied from being cautious of minute and specific details, such as the specifics of conquests, to full-blown scepticism of the entire tradition. This article seeks to contribute to this discussion by examining one of the most ubiquitously held positions on age, that of Khadījah marrying the Prophet Muḥammad at the age of 40. Based on the earliest narratives and contextual information, we argue that this age is unlikely. Instead, this number serves more as a symbolic literary device because of the way it is used in contemporaneous Arabic literature. Aspects of her biography, such as the number of children she had with the Prophet, also make this older age less likely. However, this does not necessitate disregarding the *Sīra* tradition. On the contrary, we argue that by working closely with this tradition we are able to extract a far more likely age of 28.

Introduction

The early biographies of the Prophet (*Sīra*) are immense in their magnitude consisting of hundreds of reports and pages which put together purport to historically recount the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community. On one hand, one approach uncritically accepts the contents of the *Sīra* seeing them as verbatim accurate accounts of the past. On the other hand, a mainstream trajectory dismisses the *Sīra* in their entirety, arguing that for the purpose of understanding the past they are useless. In this article, we argue for a middle position between the two, by examining one of the most ubiquitous positions in the *Sīra* narrative as a case study: that of Khadījah marrying the Prophet at the age of 40. We argue that the "40" position is untenable when we consider literary writing in the early period and other elements in the *Sīra*, showing that an uncritical adoption of the *Sīra*, does us a disservice in reconstructing the past. However, at the same time this does

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not merit dismissing the tradition in its entirety. By considering and making sure to include all the reports of the tradition, we are able to uncover conclusions and historical details that inspire greater confidence. In doing so, we underscore the immense potential of the *Sīra* for reconstructing the past. Ultimately, this article seeks to underscore how one should approach the *Sīra*. Not uncritically, but cautiously and being sure to consider the bulk of the tradition. By working closely with the tradition in this way, the *Sīra* can become a powerful repository for history. Alongside this, this article also argues for caution to be adopted in the way numbers are used in the Arabic literary tradition. The adoption of a specific number should not be seen as automatically representing an exact numerical value. Rather the number could represent a kind of literary symbolism and hence adopting the number literally would be an inaccurate way of dealing with it.

Approaches to the Early Historical Tradition

Various approaches have been adopted when discussing the early historical tradition, from the sympathetic to outright dismissal. This is compounded when we speak about the very origins of Islam and the events in the seventh century surrounding the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. One of the primary reasons for this is that virtually not a single source exists from when the critical events of Islamic history occurred. The earliest extant sources we have were written approximately 200 years after the events they purport to describe. For example, the earliest complete chronicle we have is the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq, which was only composed approximately 150 years after the death of the Prophet.

The more sympathetic historiographical approach to the early tradition holds that the accounts of the earliest Muslim community began as short, concise narratives, referred to as *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*).[1] Such reports were then transmitted orally from the original eyewitness reporters to the next generation, who then passed it on to the next and so on. It was then in the late Ummayad period that such reports were dictated into writing. These various scattered reports were compiled together to write the very first historical chronicles. This compilation was undertaken by an emerging group of scholars and sometimes within families seeking to preserve the memory of their ancestors. There was also some impetus from the ruling elite, with the Caliph Muʿāwiyah, for example, being reported to have ordered the collection of these various *akhbār*. Of particular importance during this time are the works of the two historians, who are accredited with giving structure to the *Sīra*, ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and his student Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741).[2] However, these particular works no longer exist. Nevertheless, we have good reason to believe that such works, and others like them, did indeed exist since they are referred to in later works. Moreover, large quotes from these early authorities are quoted in later works in a way that gives the

impression that they are verbatim from these earlier works. It is after this, we have the era of historians whose works are primarily extant, such as the aforementioned Ibn Isḥāq (d. 761), Abū Mikhnaf (d. 774) and Sayf bin ʻUmar (d. 769). Later on, we have the figures of al-Wāqidī (d. 823), al-Madāʾinī (d. 830), and Ibn Saʻd (d. 845). Finally, we have more sustained longer works with figures such as al-Dīnawarī (d. 891), al-Balādhurī (d. 892), al-Yaʻqūbī (d. 900), and al-Ṭabarī (d. 923).[3]

What is striking about the retelling of history in these early works is their level of detail. They are immensely full and rich in detail. In fact, Hugh Kennedy notes that we have more details about the formative period of Islam, than of any subsequent period before the appearance of documentary sources in the late Mamluk period and the Ottoman empire.[4] These early works contain eyewitness reports, detailed explanations of treaties, the exact occurrences of military conquests, dates for crucial events and the ages of individuals. How accurately these early historians preserved what happened from the years they purport to report is highly contested. Albrecht Noth called into question the accuracy of the early historiographical tradition.[5] Instead of reading such works as accurate portrayals of history, he argued they should be read as literary pieces and as a model of writing about the past. One of his main contentions is how various discrete events from different contexts are all cast in the same way. An example of this are descriptions of the early conquest narratives and sieges. Conquest accounts in some of the most far-off places, such as Damascus, Alexandria, Tustar, and Cordoba, are described with details that have an uncanny sense of unity. The exact same details emerge in each of these accounts, such as a traitor from the opposing faction who points out a weak spot in the enemy's defences; a celebration in the city which diverts the opposing army's attention; the Muslim army assaulting and scaling the walls to cries of "*Allāhu Akbar*"; the insider opening the gate, after which the Muslim army is able to enter the city. Such details are consistently present in each of the different conquest narratives.[6] Such details Noth argues should be seen as literary *topoi* or schema – stock themes that have been put together to form narratives as opposed to factual details.[7] Such formulae shape the way chroniclers wrote about the past as opposed to these details being a realistic portrayal of the past.[8]

Similarly, Tayeb el-Hibri adopts a critical literary approach to these early sources to demonstrate how these ʻAbbasid historical narratives were not intended to relay facts but provide commentary on certain political, social and religious issues, which were in turn derived from real events.[9] Such includes identifying themes in Greek tragedy and placing them in these early historical accounts. Of particular importance is the case of symbolism and the use of specific motifs in the narrative to provide a deeper, more literary shade of meaning. He shows how details in the historical narratives are not historical facts but rather literary devices. For example, he demonstrates this in the way historians wrote about the Rashidūn

Caliphs. They did so in a way that was replete with symbolic parallels with the Prophet Muḥammad and other previous prophets.[10]

The result of such scepticism has led to the dismissal in some quarters of the historical tradition in its entirety. Crone and Cook argued this case the most forcefully. They argued that the early historical tradition was constructed to give validity to the emerging Islamic polity. In other words, these historical accounts are based on an imagined idea of the past. Therefore, for the purpose of extracting information about the past, these sources are useless.[11] It is this extreme scepticism that this article seeks to address. We concur through our analysis of Khadījah's age that an uncritical surface-level reading of the *Sīra* can lead to conclusions that are implausible. The dominant position that Khadījah married the Prophet at the age of 40, becomes increasingly untenable when we read the *Sīra* in its entirety and are aware of early literary practices. However, we argue at the same time, that to dismiss the whole tradition and to view it as useless for extracting historical material is also unwarranted. Rather we argue that by dealing with the entirety of the *Sīra* and making sure to include and consider the various reports, we are able to arrive at positions that inspire greater confidence in their historical veracity.

Origins of the "40"-Year Position

The contours of Khadījah's life are relatively uniform in the early historical tradition. She is described as an esteemed, wealthy businesswoman who would hire men to conduct trade on her behalf to distant lands. In one particular expedition, she hires the Prophet Muḥammad and sends him to Boṣra in al-Shām. She also sends one of her servant boys Maysara to accompany him. During the expedition, the *Sīra* works recount certain miraculous events that occurred that convinced Khadījah to offer herself in marriage to the Prophet. At one point in the expedition, the Prophet seeks shelter underneath a tree. A nearby monk by the name of Baḥīra informs Maysara that only a Prophet would shelter under that particular tree. In another instance, while the Prophet and Maysara are riding their camels amid the midday sun, Maysara observes two angels sheltering the Prophet with their wings.[12] These events convince Khadījah to marry the Prophet. Khadījah's marriage to the Prophet in many ways occupies a lofty status. She is described as his greatest source of comfort, and it is Khadījah who comforts the Prophet at the very onset of prophecy. Khadījah is also the only wife of the Prophet that bears him children that survive to adulthood. So great is the impact of Khadījah's life on the Prophet that the year of her passing (alongside his uncle Abū Ṭālib) is described as the "year of sorrow", and in the years after her passing the Prophet would fondly remember her.

What concerns us specifically is the portrayal of Khadījah's age when she married the Prophet. What strikes the reader when reading any contemporary

biographical is the pervasive nature of Khadījah's age. She is consistently referred to as being 40 years of age while the Prophet was 25.[13] This is not surprising since this is a commonly stated age in the early historical works. In fact, one of the earliest historians, al-Balādhūrī (d. 279/892) in his *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, which records the genealogical history of the Arabs, states there to be a consensus on this issue, "the Messenger of Allah married Khadija when he was 25 years old and she was 40 years old. This is established with the scholars".[14]

It is not surprising that various scholars have invoked a consensus on this issue due to the ubiquitous nature of "40" being ascribed to Khadījah. However, the earliest extant biography of the Prophet's life, the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), of which its most famous recension is that of Ibn Hishām, curiously does not state the age of Khadījah at the time of her marriage. Rather Ibn Isḥāq merely depicts the familiar story of the events surrounding the Prophet's marriage with Khadījah. He does, however, state that the Prophet was 25 at the time. For the earliest explicit and most copious portrayals of Khadījah's age, we must look at the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845). His compendium of the biographies of the most important early Muslim figures also details many aspects of Khadījah's life. Due to Ibn Sa'd work, we have the establishment of 40 as Khadījah's age. There is a total of four narrations in his *Ṭabaqāt*, which explicitly narrate Khadījah to have been 40. Three of these narrations are found in his final volume, which is specifically dedicated to female figures (*fī al-nisā*), and one is also found in the first volume, which details the Prophet's life in general. The four narrations are:

1. Muḥammad bin 'Umar [al-Wāqidī] said: We, and the people of knowledge among us say, that Khadījah was born before the event of the elephant by 15 years. The day she married the Messenger of God she was 40 years old (*'arba'īn sana*).[15]
2. Muḥammad bin 'Umar [al-Wāqidī] informed us from Muḥammad bin 'Abdullah from al-Zuhrī from Kathīr bin Zayd that al-Muṭṭalib bin 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥanṭab said: The first woman to marry the Prophet before the prophethood was Khadījah bint Khuwaylid bin 'Asad bin 'Abd al-'Uzza bin Quṣā … he was on that day 25 years old (*khamsin wa 'ishrīn*) and Khadījah was 40 years old (*arba'īn sana*).[16]
3. Muḥammad bin 'Umar bin Wāqidī al-'Aslamā reported, that Mūsā bin Shayba reported from 'Umayra bint 'Ubaydullah bin Ka'b bin Mālik from 'Umm Sa'd bint Sa'd bin al-Rabī' that Nafīsa bint Munīa said … The Messenger of God married Khadījah when he was 25 years old (*khamsa wa 'ishrīn sana*), and Khadījah was on that day 40 years old (*yawma'idhin bint 'arba'īn sana*). She was born before the event of the elephant by 15 years.[17]
4. Muḥammad bin 'Umar [al-Wāqidī] reported that al-Mundhir bin 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥizāmī reported from Mūsā bin 'Uqba from 'Abī Ḥabība the free slave of

> al-Zubayr who said: I heard Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām say: the Messenger of God married Khadījah when she was 40 years old (*ʿarbaʿīn sana*) and the Messenger of God was 25 years old. Khadījah was two years older than me and was born 15 years before the event of the elephant. I was born before the event of the elephant by 13 years.[18]

There are a few critical points that we can extract from these four narrations. The first and most important is that every single narration that explicitly underscores the age of Khadījah as being 40 when she married the Prophet is narrated by Ibn Saʿd through Muḥammad bin ʿUmar, more commonly known as al-Wāqidī. This is not surprising since Ibn Saʿd was popularly known as the scribe of al-Wāqidī.[19] These narrations also provide other numerical evidences that can also be used to deduce the age of Khadījah with the Prophet. The first is that her age is calculated in relation to Abraha's expedition to Mecca. This is found in narrations one, two, and three. All of them state that when the event of the elephant took place, Khadījah was 15 years old.

The second is with the narrator of the second narration, Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām, who states that Khadījah was two years older than him. In light of this fact, we can also cite another similar narration found in Ibn Saʿd's al-Ṭabaqāt, also narrated by Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām, which states the age of Khadījah in relation to the Prophet: "Muḥammad bin ʿUmar reported that Mughīra bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAsdā from his family said, we asked Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām, who was older, the Messenger of God or Khadījah. He said that Khadījah was older than the messenger by 15 years".[20] Therefore, it can be seen how the age of Khadījah is explicitly placed at 40 and implicitly by situating her age in relation to Abraha's conquest of Mecca and the age of one of the narrators. However, what is interesting to note is the fact that none of the other early historiographical works explicitly state Khadījah's age to be 40. If we look at the most direct contemporary of Ibn Saʿd, al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/898), we do not see any mention of Khadījah's age. He merely states the age of the Prophet as being 25 when he married Khadījah.[21] To find the next explicit reference to Khadījah's age after Ibn Saʿd, we have to turn to the historian and exegete Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). However, even here in his mammoth work of history, there is a sole solitary narration which states: "The Messenger of God married Khadījah when he was 25 years old. At the time, Khadījah was 40 years of age".[22]

Before examining the nature of the number "40", what is significant is that all of the narrations of "40" stem from al-Wāqidī. This is significant since even among the traditionalists, al-Wāqidī as a transmitter was seen as unreliable. Modern historians of early Islam have also drawn attention to the spuriousness of materials found with al-Wāqidī.[23] Furthermore, the mathematical juggling of Ḥakīm bin

Ḥizām also brings its own set of problems. When speaking about his own life, we have, for example, corresponding narrations of when he passed away. Al-Ṭabarī reports his date of death to be 54 years (673/4) after the migration.[24] This would place Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām at the age of 120, a remarkable feature considering that the oldest recorded male to have lived was 116.[25]

Symbolism in the Number "40"

Even though "40" is the most dominant number in the early Arabic historical tradition, we would argue against seeing this number as authentically conveying a historical fact, such that this was Khadījah's age when she married the Prophet. Rather, we should see this number as conveying a symbolism to bolster the suitableness and esteem of Khadījah. First, there is the issue of the actual recording of dates in key moments in a person's life, such as births and marriages. Lawrence Conrad underscores how the ages of individuals before the advent of Islam were ambiguous, as birth dates were only known in a generic sense:

> birth dates in particular were almost never fixed with any accuracy, largely because so little attention was paid to them. One's date of birth was an insignificant and difficult to determine item of information and was so lacking in social relevance that most individuals had only a vague idea of when they had been born.[26]

This was even the case after the establishment of the Hijrī calendar, where the date of birth of even the most prominent individuals was unknown.[27] In this climate, there is a great likelihood that the exact age of Khadījah during her marriage to the Prophet was not accurately recorded and then transmitted.

In such an environment, it is not unlikely that the number "40" was adopted and then dispersed and gained traction among historians. The reason for this is precisely because it is the number "40". The narrations report her to be exactly 40, not 39 or 41. The fact that it is the number "40" merits caution since this is a number that was understood to represent symbolic meaning and found consistently in various contemporaneous literature. Previous scholars, and most notably Conrad, have previously alluded to this.[28] It was a number in general usage, much like the contemporary usage of a hundred or a thousand. For example, a modern speaker's usage of a thousand books does literally denote a thousand books, but rather a multitude. This is the same way early historians used the use of the number "40".

It is clear from the literature of this milieu that the number "4" and its derivatives, such as "40", "400", and "4,000", were used for symbolic purposes and do not necessarily reflect mathematical reality. This can be found in the narratives

associated with pre-Islamic Arabia. There is a common tendency to disregard chronology in these narratives. However, what is common is for these narratives to describe the time between two events. Here the number "40" is commonly used, such as in the construction that 40 years existed between this time and this time. Conrad underscores how it would be more accurate to interpret the usage of 40 years not as a specific measurement of time between the two events but rather as a "long time".[29] We can see the symbolism in the number "4" and its derivatives in Ibn ʻAbd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ al-Miṣr*. When ʻAmr bin al-ʻĀṣ is said to have conquered Alexandria, he wrote to the Caliph ʻUmar saying, "I have conquered a city in the description of which I will only say that in it I seized 4,000 villas, 4,000 baths, 40,000 Jews liable to pay the *jizya*, and 400 palaces".[30] The uniformity of the use of the number "4" and its derivatives in this narration underscores the symbolic nature of this number. In another example from al-Balādhūrī's *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, when the Caliph ʻAbd al-Mālik is requested to send a governor to Iṣbahān, through a spate of letters, he exclaims, "What is this Iṣbahān? Does it grow gold and silver? Forty letters have been written to me about it!"[31] Here again, we can see from the context of the number "40" that it does not literally represent the number of letters being sent to the Caliph, but rather the Caliph's exasperation of the sheer number of letters being sent. It can be seen from these two contexts how "40" does not literarily convey numerical information but rather imports symbolic meaning.

The symbolism of the number "4" and its derivatives is prominent in the most famous and famed Arabic text, the Qur'ān itself. There is no doubt that our early historians were intimately familiar with the Qur'ān. Ibn Isḥāq, for example, intersperses many of the accounts of the Prophet's biography with verses from the Qur'ān. In one curious section of his *Sīra*, we even have the complete commentary of Ṣūrat al-Duha. Even more stark is Al-Ṭabarī, who, alongside his work on history, was equally famed for his equally proportioned exegesis of the Qur'ān, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*. It would be reasonable to assume that a man of Ibn Saʻd's stature and erudition would also have had an intimate understanding and familiarity with the Qur'ān. There are numerous places the number "4" and its derivatives exist in the Qur'ān. In one of the passages Prophet Abraham asks God for a sign. In response, God commands him to kill four birds, which are subsequently brought back to life. In another chapter, the disbelievers are commanded to disperse from the land after the breaking of a treaty of four months.[32] Four witnesses are required for the acting of the *ḥudūd* punishment for fornication.[33] Aspects of the creation narrative also use the number "4".[34]

More specifically, the number "40" is explicitly used in the Qur'ān, containing a special significance. There is a sense of completion in the use of "40" when Moses is commanded to stay in Mount Sinai: "We appointed thirty nights for Moses, then added ten more: the term set by his Lord was completed in forty

nights".[35] In this verse, the number "40" is a divinely stated duration, such that "40" is directly specified and calculated exactly by God. This symbolism of "40" continues when the children of Israel disobey God's command and are made to wander the desert for "40" days.[36]

The significance of the number "40" is even explicitly alluded to in certain *ḥadīth* narrations. In the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar predicts that the Anti-Christ will appear in the world and remain for "40". When asked if this were "40" years, months or days, he replies by saying that he did not know.[37] What is significant in this narration is the number itself as opposed to it providing any factual information. It is not surprising that the number "40" importing some special significance was taken on by religious scholars in general. We see this most clearly in the narration of *ḥadīth*, where transmitters would seek to group different themes of *ḥadīth* in groups of "40". We can see this from the most well-known introductory *ḥadīth* collection, the *al-ʿArbaʿūn* (the forty) of al-Nawawī. Although entitled "the forty", it does not actually contain exactly 40 ḥadīth, but rather 42. However, the significance of the number was not lost on al-Nawawī, hence the use of the number in the title.

So far, it is clear how the number "40" is imbued with a sense of symbolism, most notably to demonstrate magnitude. Yet, how does this number's symbolism relate to the ages of individuals? Was the age of 40 understood as representing something deeper? We would be inclined to argue so, that 40 was understood as the age that represented the peak of one's maturity and strength. Take, for example, Q. 46:15:

> We have commanded people to honour their parents. Their mothers bore them in hardship and delivered them in hardship. Their *period of* bearing and weaning is thirty months. In time, when the child reaches their prime at the age of 40 (*ḥattā idha balagha ashuddahu wa balagha ʿarbaʿīna sana*), they pray, "My Lord! Inspire me to *always* be thankful for Your favours which You blessed me and my parents with, and to do good deeds that please You. And instil righteousness in my offspring. I truly repent to You, and I truly submit *to Your Will"*.[38]

This passage details the lifecycle of human beings and the duties to one's parents. What is significant is that the verses underscore "40" as an age at which one reaches the peak of one's maturity and strength. Here, human beings are no longer in a state of dependency like in their childhood, as contrasted with the earlier part of the verse, but rather physically and mentally prepared to return the obligation of care back to one's parents. At this age, the Qur'ān states that one has reached their prime (*ḥattā idha balagha ashuddahu*). Having reached one's prime, one is now able to fully show gratitude for the favours of God and one's parents and

engage in good deeds. By looking at another verse, it is possible to see the Qur'ān as viewing human beings as moving into a state of decline, deteriorating from strength to weakness: "it is God who creates you weak, then gives you strength, then weakness after strength …"[39]

Therefore, it is not surprising that "40", representing the peak of one's life, was adopted and emphasised by exegetes in their explanation of this verse. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, for example, both state that "40" is the age in which one has fully acquired intellectual and spiritual maturity, and one is fully able to focus on the worship and obedience to God. Al-Rāzī further adds that it is for this reason that prophethood is given to all the prophets at this age.[40]

There are further examples of this notion of "40" being the peak of one's age in relation to the timeframe of the Prophet's life prior to the migration. For instance, al-Jāhiẓ mentions in his *Rasā'il* that no one was allowed to enter Dār al-Nadwa (the place when the Quraysh would gather to make important decisions), unless they had reached the age of 40.[41] Al-Madā'inī reports that the turbans that tribal leaders wore during the time of the Prophet were restricted to mature adults, and this was restricted to those who were over the age of 40.[42] These kinds of reports about the Prophet's time may have been reported later, much like the early Arabic historical works under discussion, and hence historically inaccurate. Yet, crucially, they indicate the ideas circulating around this time concerning the symbolism of the number "40" and what it represents.

This notion of "40" is a consistent motif in other forms of Arabic literature. In the *Tārīkh* of al-Dimashqī, we again have this concept emphasising how the age of 40 is the ideal age for maturity and intellect. In one narration, Abū 'Amr al-Shaybānī reports about himself that on the day of al-Qādisīya, "I reached the end of my youth, being 40 years of age".[43] One of the great early commentators of the Qur'ān, Qatāda (d. 118/736), states that 40 is the age when the wicked mischief of youth ceases.[44] In another place, al-Ṭabarī sees 40 as the age when man loses the last of his childhood ignorance.[45] Equally telling is al-Maqdisī's geographical work, where he feels the need to assure the reader in the introduction that he did not write his work until he had travelled across every land and served men of science and religion and crucially until he had reached the age of 40.[46] In the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, the Ummayad poet 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a (d. 93/712) is said to have wasted his life in debauchery, and it was only at the age of 40 that he changed his ways.[47] Looking at these various examples, it is clear that the number "40" was understood symbolically as a motif of one's age that represents maturity and the peak of one's adulthood. Hence, the use of the age of 40 in relation to describing Khadījah's age behoves us to look deeper to ascertain its veracity. The fact that we know that "40" was used and understood symbolically opens the possibility for this to be the case with Khadījah also.

Depiction of Khadījah

It would be hasty to dismiss the age of 40 for Khadījah purely on the basis that this number was commonly used symbolically. Khadījah could indeed have been 40. The existence of the number's symbolism does not negate this possibility. However, we would argue there are three good reasons to suppose otherwise, and when we consider these three reasons in unison, a different age would seem to be more likely. The first reason is related to the additional accompanying information provided in the accounts of Khadījah's marriage to the Prophet. For the symbolism of the number "40" to apply, denoting the peak of one's strength and maturity, we would expect these sources to emphasise such traits in their works. Looking at the sections that describe the marriage of Khadījah with the Prophet, we can certainly see this to be the case.

When we examine the depiction of Khadījah in the narratives, it is possible to see these early historians underscoring the suitability of Khadījah in marrying the Prophet. The image that is given of Khadījah was that she was no ordinary woman, and hence the appropriateness of her marriage to a Prophet. We can see this seeping through the auxiliary descriptions that accompany the descriptions of Khadījah during the proposal and her eventual marriage to the Prophet. The descriptions do not merely describe her wealth and status as a businesswoman, but the image that is painted is that she was the most mature and wisest woman of her time. Her designation of being 40 years of age potentially further subliminally solidifies this message. We see this in virtually all the early works of *Sīra*, from Ibn Isḥāq to Ibn Sa'd to al-Ṭabarī.

Starting with Ibn Isḥāq, he narrates that when Khadījah hired the Prophet to work on her behalf, she was a "wealthy and esteemed woman (*dhū māl wa sharaf*)". He then goes on to say that Khadījah was from "the best lineages of the Quraysh, and the greatest in respect and the richest, and every man would strive to marry her if they had the ability to do so".[48] This depiction underscores the superiority of Khadījah over other women. In a society that prized one's ancestors, she is naturally from the very best lineages. Furthermore, not only is she a wealthy woman, but her character is also superior. She is a woman who is held in high esteem (*sharaf*). This esteem is again emphasised such that she was the most desired woman, who any man would seek out in marriage if they could.

These traits and the superiority of Khadījah are again emphasised, but with greater potency in the narrative of Ibn Sa'd, where we see the first occurrence of her age being 40. Ibn Sa'd states that Khadījah was

> a woman of resolve (*hāzima*), strength (*jaldata*), honour (*sharīfa*) … she was the loftiest among the Quraysh in lineage, the greatest of them in honour, and the

> greatest of them in wealth and every man from her people strove to marry her, if they were able to. They would ask for her [hand] and exert their wealth for her.[49]

This motif of every man that was able to seek out her hand in marriage if they were able to, is carried on by Ibn Sa'd. He also repeats similar claims to Ibn Isḥāq that she was from the best lineages and the most honoured. However, Ibn Sa'd states more of her traits, showing her to be a superior woman with regard to her character. He describes her with qualities that underscore maturity and would be ascribed to a person at their intellectual and physical peak. She is mentally strong by being a woman of resolve (*ḥāzima*). At the same time, she is also physically strong by being a woman of strength (*jaldata*).

If we then move on to al-Ṭabarī, we again have this same message being reinforced:

> Khadijah was then the most distinguished of the women of Quraysh in lineage, the most highly honoured, and the wealthiest, and all the men of her tribe would have been eager to accept this proposal had it been made to them.[50]

It can therefore be seen how there is a common thread that is ubiquitous in all of these early sources that detail the marriage of the Prophet with Khadījah. She is the most superior woman from among her people, such that she is highly desired by other men and the most honoured. Her superiority is not only material and from the heritage of her lineage, but from traits that she herself has, associated with maturity and dignity. These accompanying descriptions link firmly with what is symbolised by a person being 40 years of age in that cultural milieu. Associating the age of 40 with Khadījah would potentially further implicitly emphasise these traits and thereby underscore the suitability of her marriage with the Prophet.

Khadījah's Children

There is another factor to consider when dealing with 40 as the age of Khadījah's marriage to the Prophet. This has to do with the number of children she is said to have borne with him. First, we should note that the sources do not state that she only had children with the Prophet. Certain narrations give the impression that she bore children prior to her marriage to the Prophet from previous marriages. She is depicted as having a daughter with her first husband, 'Atīq bin 'Abid al-Makhhzūmī, called Hind. After 'Atīq, she is said to have married 'Abū Hāla bin al-Nabbāsh, where she gave birth to a son.[51]

Our early historical sources recount Khadījah and the Prophet to have had, at the very least, six children. Certain sources extend this to seven. What is

unanimously uncontested is their four daughters: Ruqayyah, Zaynab, Umm Kulthūm, and Fāṭimah. The area of contention occurs with the number of sons they are said to have had. Regardless of the exact number, what is unchallenged is that all of their sons died in their infancy, an allusion to which is found in Q. 108, the very shortest chapter of the Qur'ān.[52] What is challenged is the exact number. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, seems to be of the opinion that the couple had three sons, Qāsim, al-Ṭāhir and al-Tayyib. Qāsim also being the son, through which the Prophet received his *kunya*, Abū al-Qāsim.[53] However, divergent opinions hold that al-Ṭāhir and al-Tayyib may not be the actual names of two different sons but rather the nicknames of a single son, by the name of ʻAbdullāh. The more common opinion found in the sources is this latter view. Ibn Saʻd provides various narrations that gravitate towards this latter stance, and provides a detailed account of the serial of the children's birth:

> Hishām bin Muḥammad bin al-Sāʻib al-Kalbī informed us from his father from Abī Ṣāleh from Ibn ʻAbbās who said: The first to be born to the Messenger of God was before prophethood was Al-Qāsim, as he was called. Then Zaynab was born, then Ruqqayya, then Fāṭima, then Umm Kulthūm, then during the period of Islam [after the prophethood], ʻAbd Allāh was born, who was also called al-Ṭayyib and al-Ṭāhir. And the mother of all of them was Khadījah bint Khuwaylid.[54]

Regardless of if the exact number of children was six or seven, what is undisputed is that the sources maintain Khadījah to have given birth to such an extraordinary number of children at an older age. This would not be so extraordinary if Khadījah were younger, but for her to begin giving birth after the age of 40 makes this more unexpected. In one narration, Ibn Saʻd maintains that the children were born one after another. This would mean that at the very least, Khadījah would have had to be 48 for the birth of her final child. This is, of course, not impossible, but highly unlikely. First of all, it is by no means unanimous that the children were born one after another. In fact, certain later sources also date the birth of her youngest son to have been after the proclamation. Ibn al-Qayyim in his *Sīra* work acknowledges that there is a difference of opinion in the earlier sources with regard to when ʻAbdullāh was born, with some holding him to be born before the proclamation of Islam and others holding it to be after. However, it is the summation of Ibn al-Qayyim that ʻAbdullāh was in fact born after the proclamation by a year. This would place the Prophet at 41 years of age and Khadījah at 56.[55] This, therefore, raises the possibility that there were gaps between the births of each child. This would mean that Khadījah gave birth to children at an even greater age. If we adopt the position of al-Ṭabarī that they had seven children, we would need to push this age higher. Furthermore, all these contentions do not take into consideration issues

surrounding contraception, which was known at the time and can be traced back all the way to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad.[56]

A point that links to the issue of Khadījah's children has to do with not what is articulated in the early historical works, but also what is unarticulated. There is no mention of anything extraordinary in the births of such a large number of children at a relatively old age. This point was alluded to by Montgomery Watt. Concerning the number of children she bore, he writes,

> this is by no means impossible, but one would have thought it sufficiently unusual to merit comment; it is even the sort of thing that might well have been treated as miraculous. Yet no single word of comment occurs in the pages of Ibn Hisham, Ibn Sa'd, or at-Tabari.[57]

Leading on from this, the association of the miraculous with giving birth to children at an older age was a commonly used motif in the Islamic cultural milieu. The Qur'ān itself recounts the birth of Yayha after a prayer from his father Zakariyya, who implores God for a child despite old age, "my bones have weakened and my hair in ashen grey".[58]

The way the sources date Khadījah's death can also be used to inform our understanding of the likelihood of a later date for her marriage in light of the number of children she bore. Naturally, adopting a later age for marriage would push this age further forward, while adopting a younger age would push this more backward. Going back to Ibn Sa'd, we find him recording an opinion from Muḥammad bin 'Umar al-Wāqidī that "she passed away on the tenth of the month of Ramadan in the tenth year of the prophethood three years before the migration and she was 65".[59] This narration, although starting with al-Wāqidī, is found in two different pathways. The first is from Muḥammad Ibn 'Umar from Ma'mar bin Rāshid from al-Zuhrī from 'Urwa from 'Ā'isha.[60] The second is Muḥammad ibn 'Umar from al-Mundhir bin 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥizāmī from Mūsā bin 'Uqb from Abī Ḥabība the free slave of al-Zubayr from Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām.[61] A similar sentiment is also given, in another narration without al-Wāqidī: "Muḥammad Ibn Sāleḥ and 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin 'Abd al-'Azīz both said: Khadījah passed away on the tenth of Ramadān, and this was before the migration by three years. She was on that day, 65 years old".[62] Adopting this age would give Khadījah approximately 15 years to give birth to six (or seven) children. However, the age of her death is disputed. Al-Bayhaqī, for example, after listing the number of children that Khadījah gave birth to, and the deaths of her two sons, states how certain narrations speak of Khadījah dying at the age of 65. However, he then goes on to contradict this age by subsequently stating, "and it is said that she was 50 and this is more correct".[63] This earlier age for her death is also quoted in Ibn Kathīr, who adopts this same

opinion by quoting al-Bayhaqī of 50 being the more correct age.[64] It can be seen therefore how there is a definite current that holds Khadījah to have passed away at a younger age. This would further restrict the number of years of giving birth to her children to merely ten years.

Variant Narrations

The two factors mentioned so far, although compelling, do not on their own justify dismissing this age. Number "40" may well have been used as a symbolic number, but Khadījah could have very well have been 40 as well. Having a significant number of children at a later age, although unlikely, is still possible. However, when we consider these two factors with a third, that variant opinions exist even in the very earlier sources, a different age becomes significantly more compelling.

There are various other ages that are also postulated by medieval historians. Al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), for example, underscores there to be three opinions for her ages 45, 40, and 28.[65] In a later work, Muḥammad al-Zurqānī (d. 1710) records the ages as possibly being 45, 30, and 28.[66] Interestingly enough, in one of the most popular medieval works, that of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), he does not even mention "40" at all. Rather, he adopts the stance that Khadījah was considerably younger. The two possibilities, which he quotes as coming from al-Bayhaqī from al-Ḥākim, is that she was either 35 or 25.[67] Of these variant ages, the one that is most prominent in the very early works is 28. On the other hand, it is difficult to trace the ages of 30, 35, and 45 to any of the earliest historical works prior to these medieval historians.

So where does this age of 28 stem from? We can see one of the earliest traces of this number in no other than in Ibn Sa'd's Ṭabaqāt, the earliest source for the 40-year opinion. We have already quoted earlier four narrations that state this age. However, alongside this, Ibn Sa'd also quotes one other variant opinion: "Hishām bin Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib reported (*akhbarnā*) from his father from Abī Ṣāleh from Ibn 'Abbās, who said: The day Khadījah married the Messenger of God she was 28 (*thamānin wa 'ishrīn sana*). Her dowry was twelve camels, as was the dowry of women".[68] Such a report blatantly contradicts the four other reports. Based on pure frequency, one may gravitate to the 40-year opinion. However, there is one crucial difference. All four narrations for the age-40 opinion stem from al-Wāqidī, and as we mentioned previously, this brings with it its own set of issues due to the nature of al-Wāqidī as a narrator. On the other hand, the age-28 opinion is the only narration that does not come from al-Wāqidī, rather it comes from Hishām bin Muḥammad.

However, it is possible to suppose that the 28-year opinion predates Ibn Sa'd and argue that the 28-year opinion is in fact found in the very earliest work of

Sīra, that of Ibn Isḥāq. However, how can this be the case if we have already stated that the extant work of Ibn Isḥāq we possess is silent on this issue? This is because later sources seem to ascribe the 28-year position to Ibn Isḥāq. For example, Al-Ḥākim's in his *Mustadrak* narrates:

> Abū Bakr Aḥmad bin 'Aḥmad bin Bālūn informed me, through ʿAbd Allāh bin 'Ahmad bin Ḥanbal, that 'Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin 'Ayyūb reported through Ibrāhīm bin Sa'd, from *Muḥammad bin 'Isḥāq* that Abū Ṭālib and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid both died in the same year. And this was before the migration of the Prophet peace be upon him to Madīna, by three years. Khadījah was buried in Ḥajūn, and she was buried by the Prophet. And the day he married her she was 28 years old.[69]

How does one therefore deal with the contradiction that Ibn Isḥāq's work does not state this age, yet later sources ascribe this age back to him? The answer to this can potentially lie with the redactor of Ibn Isḥāq's work, Ibn Hishām. We have Ibn Isḥāq's work through this intermediary, and because *this particular* recension does not mention any age it does not dismiss the possibility that Ibn Isḥāq did indeed ascribe to this position. In fact, Ibn Ḥishām himself makes clear that he gave himself editorial licence to remove or omit Ibn Isḥāq's words. He informs us how he omitted anything that had no bearing on the Qur'ān, things that were repugnant or may cause offence. Poems that were not attested in any other sources and matters that certain transmitters would not accept as being trustworthy.[70] We know that Ibn Isḥāq's work was far greater and his *Sīra* was a part of a larger work that attempted to the entire history of humanity, starting with the Prophet Adam.[71] Furthermore, there were multiple recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's work, each transmitted by the various students of Ibn Isḥāq. Ibn Hishām merely represents only of these recensions. It is not unlikely to suppose that Ibn Hishām's recession omits this important narration, but that Ibn Isḥāq did indeed ascribe to this position.

Conclusion

This article has examined one of the most widely held assumptions regarding age in early Arabic history writing. It has closely examined the notion that Khadījah was 40 when she married the Prophet. However, on closer examination this age becomes increasingly unlikely. Reference to this age is found in Ibn Sa'd's Ṭabaqāt, from the authority of Al-Wāqidī, a figure whose authenticity has been widely dubbed as spurious. The fact that it is precisely the number "40" also merits suspicion. This number is used in the literature of this milieu to symbolise the multitude or the prime of one's age. When looking at the auxiliary depictions

of Khadījah, this same motif is also portrayed. Furthermore, this greater age of 40 makes other biographical information about Khadījah unlikely. She is said to have borne at least six children. When we consider such factors: a greater number of children, no reference to the miraculous and an earlier date of death, an older age becomes increasingly unlikely.

These two factors by themselves do not force us to dismiss the "40" position. However, what further strengthens this is the existence of variant narrations, the most likely being 28. Such a narration is also found in Ibn Sa'd's work, although crucially without the transmission of al-Wāqidī. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that the narration actually predates Ibn Sa'd and is found in the very earliest historical work, the *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq. Although the recension of Ibn Hishām does not mention any age at all, later sources ascribe the "28" positions to Ibn Isḥāq. It is possible that Ibn Isḥāq did indeed hold this position, which was later redacted by Ibn Hishām, as he himself acknowledges of doing in other parts. By considering all these points in unison, Khadījah marrying the Prophet at 40 becomes a difficult position to adopt. Adopting "28" bypasses the concerns of the symbolic usage of "40" as well as the unlikelihood of bearing a large number of children at an older age.

Through all of this, we have sought to underscore how we should view the *Sīra* literature for its historical value. We argue that a cautious balanced position to the *Sīra* should be adopted. This is a stance that does not uncritically accept all its specifics, but at the same time does not view the *Sīra* as worthless in reconstructing historical information. Rather, by casting our net widely and being judicious in examining the various narrations and accounts on a single topic, we are able to extract details that are more plausible, hence underscoring the value of the Sīra as a source for reconstructing early Islamic history. Furthermore, we also underscore how one should approach the use of numbers in the Arabic literary tradition. Instead of automatically assuming that a specific number represents a literal numerical value, it should be recognised that the number could in fact be being used as a form of literary symbolism and hence interpreted as such.

Notes

1 Reports more specifically relating to the Prophet's sayings, actions and approvals were more specifically referred to as *ḥadīth*.

2 Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates, 3rd ed.* (London: Routledge, 2016), 302.

3 A topography of the earliest historians can be found in Chase F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiv–xv. Such compilers and their works are often divided into certain schools, such as the "Medinan School" and the "Iraqi School", of which preponderance is often given to transmitters from the former, see Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, trans. Michael David Bonner (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994), 4.

4 Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 299.
5 Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*.
6 Noth and Conrad, 19. It should be noted how there should be a degree of caution towards ascribing everything as literary *topoi*. For example, Syriac sources seem to depict the shouting of "Allāhu Akbar" as a distinctive battle cry of the early Muslim armies, thereby bolstering the view that such did occur in various contexts, see Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 12.
7 A *topoi* may have been an historical event at one point, but is then transferred to different contexts to become a literary device. When it shifts from one context to another and appears in a recurring manner it becomes a *topoi*. A schema on the other hand has to do with form, in connecting and organising content in a certain way. It is a paradigm of writing history, Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, 109–110.
8 Noth and Conrad, 19. Certain works have carried this tradition further, see for example, Lawrence I. Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwad: A Source-Critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East", in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1992), 317–401. More recent works have adapted Noth's conclusions on *topoi*. Nicola Clarke, for example, argues that even though there is formulaic similarity in events, this cannot necessarily be extrapolated to every period, such as the Iberian Peninsula. She argues how chronicles may have followed a common formula, but by examining areas that they emphasised, as well as what they did not we can extrapolate what these writers held as important in these narratives, Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).
9 Tayeb el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Arabic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.
10 Tayeb el-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
11 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). The work of Cook and Crone was preceded by the works of John Wansbrough who in many ways provided the foundation of such a radical critique of the sources, see John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
12 Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 79–83; Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Muḥammad at Mecca*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, vol. 6 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 44–50; Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktaba al-Khānijī, 2001), 109; Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, vol. 10 (Cairo: Maktaba al-Khānijī, 2001), 16–18.
13 See for example, Safī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī, *Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā', 2009), 67; Martin Lings, *Muhammad* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 33–36.
14 'Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *'Ansāb al-' Ashrāf*, ed. S. D. Goiten (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1936), 98.
15 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:18.
16 Ibn Sa'd, 10:205.
17 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 1:109.
18 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:18.

19 Although al-Waqīdī was himself a chronicler and his work Kitāb al-Maghāzī is extant, we do not find any mention of reference to the events of the Prophet's marriage with Khadījah and subsequently her age since the work only deals with the events of the Prophet's life after the migration, see Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb Al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, 3 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

20 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:16.

21 Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya'qūbī, *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ Al-Ya'qūbī*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon et al., vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 614. Al-Ya'qūbī does however also state the alternative opinion that holds the Prophet to have been 30 when he married Khadījah.

22 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Muḥammad at Mecca*, 6:47.

23 Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 223–224; Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 63–64; G. R. Hawting, "Al-Hudaybiyya and the Conquest of Mecca", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 17. See also, Imtiaz Ahmad, "Wāqidī as a Traditonist", *Islamic Studies* 18, no. 9 (1979): 243–254.

24 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and Their Successors*, trans. Ella Landau-Tasseron, vol. 39 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 40. See also, Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Ḥākim, *Mustadrak Al-Ḥākim*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1990), 200., Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb Al-'Asmā' Wa al-Lughāt*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 157.

25 Jiroemon Kimura from Japan was born on 19 April 1897 and died on 12 June 2013 aged 116 years 54 days, see Guinness World Records, *Guinness World Records 2019*, 2018, 88.

26 Lawrence I. Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary 'Topoi' in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 2 (1987): 229.

27 Lawrence I. Conrad, "Seven and the Tasbī': On the Implications of Numerical Symbolism for the Study of Medieval Islamic History", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 1 (1988): 42–73.

28 Ignaz Goldziher, *Abhandlungen Zur Arabischen Philologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1896); Leone Caetani, *Annali Dell' Islam*, vol. 4 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1911); Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad".

29 Aḥmad Ibn Aḥmad Maydānī, *Majma 'Al-Amthāl*, ed. Muḥammad Abd al-Ḥamīd, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1959), 439; Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Al-Aghānī*, vol. 4 (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1905), 143; A. A. Bevan, ed., *Naqā'id Jarīr Wa-'l Farazdaq*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1905), 86, 92, 108; Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad", 231.

30 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, ed. Charles C. Torrey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 82; Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad", 230.

31 al-Balādhurī, *'Ansāb al-'Ashrāf*, 337; Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad", 230.

32 Q. 2:226; 2:260; 9:2.

33 Q. 24:4. 24:13.

34 Q. 41:10.

35 Q. 7:142. See also Q. 2:51.

36 Q. 5:26. The notion of "40" as a symbolic device is not unique to the Qur'ān. It also exists in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rain in the flood of Noah occurs "forty days and forty nights". (Genesis 7:12). Moses spends forty days and forty nights without substance, while writing down the ten commandments (Exodus 34:28) and The Children of Israel are made to wonder for forty years (Ezekiel 29:13).

37 Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1894), 166.
38 Q. 46:15. Translation from Mustafa Khattāb.
39 Q. 30:54.
40 Al-Rāzī does however, state Jesus to be an exception to this since he was the only prophet to be given prophethood as a baby. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātih Al-Ghayb*, vol. 28 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), 18–19; Abul Fidā' Ismail Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, vol. 9 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), 60.
41 al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khānijī, 1964), 300. I am indebted to Lawrence Conrad for many of the upcoming references.
42 Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb Al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 560–561; Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb Al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1079.
43 Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī, *Tārīkh*, ed. Shukr Allāh al-Qūchānī, vol. 1 (Damascus: Majma 'al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya, 1980), 659.
44 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi 'Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 24 (Cairo, 1912), 12.
45 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi 'Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4 (Cairo, 1912), 51.
46 Muḥammad al-Maqdisī, *Aḥsan Al-Taqsīm Fī Ma'rifat al-Aqlālīm* (Cairo: Maktaba Madbūlī, 1991).
47 Abu al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb Al-Aghānī*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1905), 36.
48 Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Al-Nabawī*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 129.
49 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 1:109.
50 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Muḥammad at Mecca*, 6:48.
51 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:205.
52 "We have truly given abundance (*kawthar*) to you [Prophet], so pray to your Lord and make your sacrifice to Him alone. It is the one who hates you who has been cut off (*abtar*)". The chapter states how the Prophet had been granted a river by the name of *kawthar* as a response to the ridicule that that Prophet faced in losing his sons at a young age. In particular, sources maintain it is a reference to the death of his youngest son, 'Abdullāh. The chapter, however, turns this around and proclaims that it is rather his enemies who will be "cut off (*abtar*)". The use of the word *abtar* referring to the usage of this word by the Arabs to describe someone who has only daughters and no sons.
53 al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Muḥammad at Mecca*, 6:48.
54 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 1:111. In another variant narration Ibn Sa'd again solidifies that the couple did have two sons, alongside four daughters. All the children are named as in the previous narration except for the name of the youngest son who in this narration called al-Ṭāhir (instead of 'Abdullah), and his nickname was Muṭṭahir. Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:205–206.
55 Muhammad Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād Al-Ma'ād*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Al-Risāla Publishers, 1994), 101. It should be noted that Ibn Ishāq seems to be of the opinion that all of the Prophet's children, including 'Abdullah was born prior to the proclamation, Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Al-Nabawī*, 130.
56 He bases this on some of the earliest ḥadīths on this issue, which underscore that the Prophet knew about the practice of birth control through coitus interruptus and did not forbid it as well as in other narrations actually permit the practice, see Basem Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15–16.

57 W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 38.
58 Q. 19:4. Furthermore, 40 can perhaps be seen as even older than the contemporary notions of giving birth since it was common for women at the time to marry at a significantly younger age. Another of the Prophet's wife, 'Aisha for example, is said to have married him at the age of 6, with consummation occurring at 9, see Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārī no. 5133, Nabia Abbot, *Aishah The Beloved of Mohammed* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942).
59 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:206.
60 This narration merely specifies that she passed away three years before the migration and before the imposition of prayer, Ibn Sa'd, 10:19.
61 This second one specifies further specifies that this was in the month of Ramadan and was the tenth year of the prophethood, Ibn Sa'd, 10:19.
62 Ibn Sa'd, 10:19. Cf Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988), 71; al-Ḥākim, *Mustadrak Al-Ḥākim*, 3:201 (No. 4838).
63 al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-Nubūwa*, 2:70–71.
64 Abul Fidā' Ismail Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, trans. Trevor Le Gassick, vol. 1 (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1998), 190.
65 Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb Al-'Asmā' Wa al-Lughāt*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 342.
66 Muḥammad al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ Al-Zurqānī 'alā al-Mawāhib al-Ladunīa Bi'l-Manaḥ al-Muḥammadiya*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), 374. The age of 30 seems to be somewhat of an anomaly since this age is not found anywhere else.
67 Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, 1:190.
68 Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2001, 10:18.
69 al-Ḥākim, *Mustadrak Al-Ḥākim*, 3:200. (no. 4837).
70 Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, 691; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 6.
71 We know this since the latter historian, al-Mas'ūdī makes it clear that Ibn Isḥāq's work attempted to write on the "expeditions of the Prophet as well as the stories of the beginning of creation". Prior Ibn Isḥāq, al-Mas'ūdī states that such anecdotes were scattered and unorganised, see Abūl Ḥasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj Al-Dhahab Wa-Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, vol. 5 (l'Universite Libanasise, 1965), 211. For a discussion on the debates around the history of Ibn Isḥāq's composition and its different recensions, see Sean Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam* (California: University of California Press, 2020), 158–171.

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